DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 241 CE 083 603

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TITLE	Career Passports, Portfolios, and Certificates. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CE-02-238
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	4p.; Digest Number 238.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0013
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education, The Ohio State University, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090. For full text: http://www.ericacve.org/pubs.asp.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Planning; *Education Work Relationship; *Educational Certificates; Educational Experience; Employment Potential; High Schools; *Job Skills; Portfolio Assessment; *Portfolios (Background Materials); Skill Development; Student Evaluation; *Student Records
IDENTIFIERS	*Career Passports; Certificate of Initial Mastery

ABSTRACT

Secondary educators are using ways other than the traditional high school diploma and transcript to communicate students' new and different sets of knowledge and skills to employers. A career passport may be characterized as a formal product or document in which students present the many marketable skills they have developed through their life experiences. A career portfolio is a similar product with a different focus; it is a working tool that organizes information and documents for career planning and self-assessment. Both passports and portfolios represent a combination of developmental process and summative product. The value of either is twofold: students come to an awareness of their own skills and experience, and employers have richer, more detailed information for hiring decisions than is provided in transcripts and diplomas. Examples are the Ohio Individual Career Plan and Career Passport and the South Dakota Career and Life Planning Portfolio. A career certificate is a document issued by an educational agency formally attesting that a student posses specific skills. Examples are the Wisconsin Employability Skills Certificate, Connecticut Career Certificate, and Oregon Certificates of Mastery. (Contains 16 references.) (YLB)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

ERIC Digest

no. 238

by Michael E. Wonacott

2002

EDO-CE-02-238

Career Passports, Portfolios, and Certificates

One of the pressing needs of employers today is for workers with new and different sets of knowledge and skills, including positive attitudes, good work habits, the ability to learn a diverse set of tasks, and problem-solving, communication, scientific, and interpersonal skills (Connecticut Department of Labor 2001). Educators, especially those in career and technical education (CTE), are addressing those new and different sets of knowledge and skills alongside other, more traditional knowledge and skills. In addition, however, educators must *communicate* those new and different sets of knowledge and skills to employers.

Unfortunately, the traditional high school diploma and transcript do not communicate that information well to employers (***Bridging the Gap*** 1993). Neither provides the information employers want on thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and group skills; transcript information may be inconsistent or difficult to interpret; a diploma often reflects minimum standards; and schools sometimes do not respond to requests for transcripts in a timely manner. This *Digest* reviews other ways secondary educators are using to communicate students' new and different sets of knowledge and skills to employers—passports, portfolios, and certificates.

A career passport may be characterized as "a formal product or document in which students present the many marketable skills they have developed through their life experiences (Charner and Bhaerman 1986, p. 1). A career portfolio is a similar product with a different focus; it is a working tool that organizes information and documents for career planning and self-assessment (Pond et al. 1998). A career certificate is a document issued by an educational agency formally attesting that a student possesses specific skills.

Career Passports and Career Portfolios

Portfolios have long been used in some professions to showcase professional work and skill. In education, portfolios have also been used for assessment, including self-assessment (Lankes 1995; Pond et al. 1998). Both career portfolios and career passports reflect this dual focus—students assess themselves in the process of developing a product, and the resulting product showcases and documents their experiences and skills. A distinction is sometimes drawn between a portfolio as developmental and a passport as summative (***Bridging the Gap*** 1993). With portfolios, more emphasis is put on the developmental process of self-assessment, planning, and goal-setting; with passports, more emphasis is put on the final product that sums up the results of the process and communicates them to others.

In practice, however, both passports and portfolios represent a combination of developmental process and summative product. The value of the passport or portfolio is also twofold: students come to an awareness of their own skills and experience, and employers have richer, more detailed information for hiring decisions than is provided in transcripts and diplomas. As early as the mid-1980s, Charner and Bhaerman (1986) advocated a Career Passport as a way for secondary students to identify and document their work and nonwork experiences and to translate those experiences into statements of skills specifically related to work. The process was necessary for students to understand what they had to offer to employers; the resulting Career Passport provided employers with critical information to supplement the information in school transcripts or even resumes.

The Ohio Individual Career Plan (ICP) and Career Passport. The Ohio Career Passport is the capstone of students' career decision-making process, begun before the ninth grade (Gahris n.d.) The planning and decision making involved in the ICP process lead to each student's Career Passport, an individual credential housing an array of formal documents that students use in the next step after high school. Components include a letter of verification from the school; a student-developed resume; a student narrative identifying career goals and underlying rationale; a transcript (including attendance); diplomas, certificates, licenses, or other credentials; and a list of any specific vocational program competencies. The state recommends housing those components in a consistent, easily recognizable folder. Students develop ICPs through career interest and aptitude assessment, exploration experiences, preferably through job shadowing, and annual review and revision in high school. The ICP and Career Passport can be developed in any statewide curriculum area but most often this occurs in English or social studies, with assistance from the computer instructor and guidance counselor. Classroom support materials include elementary, middle, and high school *Career Development Blueprints* and sample activity packets (***Classroom Support Materials*** n.d.). All Ohio schools are required to provide students the opportunity to complete the ICP and Career Passport in a structured classroom setting and local school boards may make the Career Passport a graduation requirement for their district, although parents may choose not to have their child involved.

The South Dakota Career and Life Planning Portfolio. The Career and Life Planning Portfolio is a collection of work that documents a student's skills, abilities, and ambitions (Division of Workforce and Career Preparation 1999; "DWCP Wins National Award" 2000). Usually organized in a standard jacket with color-coded folders, documentation can include both examples of work and information on career and education planning, skills employers want, projects/work samples, and assessment results. The Portfolio, which is not required, can be used for a variety of educational purposes, but its ultimate use is to house the projects and work samples that demonstrate to a prospective employer that the student has the skills and talents the employer needs. Based on a model developed by the Sioux Falls School District and tested at 25 state high schools, the Portfolio is accompanied by curriculum materials, activities, and resources for teachers.

Career Certificates

The Wisconsin Employability Skills Certificate. The Employability Skills Certificate Program is designed for students who do not participate in the Cooperative Education Skills Certificate Program and the Youth Apprenticeship Program (Lifework Education Team 2000). The Employability Skills Certificate, issued by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, recognizes students' mastery of the employability skills identified by the U.S. Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). To participate in the voluntary program, local districts must provide three required components:

- **Instruction and assessment of SCANS skills**—Instruction can be provided in any curriculum area, and demonstration and assessment can occur either in the school or in the community.
- **School-supervised work-based learning experience**—Considerable flexibility is allowed for local districts in providing work-based learning experiences, which can include existing cooperative education, work experience, internships, or service learning programs. A minimum of 180 total work hours is required; occupation-related instruction is not required.
- **Career planning**—Working with parents and school personnel, each student develops a written Individual Career Plan (ICP) to make appropriate career, educational, and occupational choices. The ICP identifies tentative career goals and concrete, specific steps after high school to realize those goals; schools manage the

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ICP process and provide objective data both for original development and periodic reevaluation.

The Connecticut Career Certificate (CCC). Part of the continuing School-to-Career (STC) system, the CCC verifies that a student has mastered a set of employability, academic, and technical skills identified in a partnership between the state Departments of Labor, Education, and Higher Education and the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (Connecticut Department of Labor 2001; Stickney and Alamprese 2001). The CCC is awarded by state-approved local districts to students who achieve all required competencies in one of eight career clusters. *Academic standards* (reading, writing, communication skills, math, science, and computer knowledge) are based on state-determined levels of performance on one of four assessments: Connecticut Mastery Test, administered to all 8th-grade students; the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, administered to all 10th-grade students; the voluntary Scholastic Assessment Test; or the voluntary Comprehensive Adult Students Assessment System, Level C or D. *Employability standards* (attitudes and attributes, customer service, teamwork, and adaptability), which are integrated curriculum frameworks for all eight career clusters, are correlated with SCANS skills. Both academic and employability standards are common across all eight career clusters, whereas technical skills and standards vary by cluster. The number of CCCs awarded has increased from 101 statewide in 1997-98 to 569 in 2000-01. More substantial percentages of high school students participated in STC career development activities—for example, 72 percent in career counseling and 50 percent each in career interest surveys and portfolio development.

The Oregon Certificates of Mastery. By the school year 2004-05, all Oregon high schools will be required to offer the Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM). Designed to prepare students for success in their next steps after high school, the CAM documents each student's academic and career-related knowledge and skills (Oregon Department of Education 2001). In the 2001 CAM model, academic skills include state performance standards in English (reading, speaking, and writing) math, science, and social science; these are four of the seven standards required for the state's Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), which also include art, second language, and physical education. CAM candidates can meet the four required CIM performance standards either through CIM knowledge and skill tests or through CIM work samples. The six career-related learning standards—"fundamental skills essential for success in employment, college, family and community life" (p. 12)—include personal management, problem solving, communication, teamwork, employment foundations, and career development. To earn a CAM, each student must develop, review, and update an education plan for next steps after high school; develop an education profile to document progress and achievement; meet performance standards for applying academic and career-related knowledge and skills in new and complex situations; demonstrate career-related knowledge and skills; participate in planned career-related learning experiences; and satisfy the four CIM standards. Students can select specific areas of their education profile to document and communicate specific knowledge and skills to specific audiences, such as employers, and supplement that with a record of personal accomplishments, experiences, and skills.

Other examples could be added to those presented here. Oklahoma's 2001 ***Career Activity File: Career Portfolios K-12*** (2001), Arizona's ***Career Pathways: An Implementation and Resource Guide*** (1997), and Michigan's proposed Content Standards and Working Draft Benchmarks for Career and Employability Skills (***Using Employability Skills*** 1998) all address the same need for students to communicate knowledge and skills not captured well by traditional diplomas and transcripts. Whether an empty structure to fill or a carefully defined credential to earn, career passports, portfolios, and certificates provide a new means for students to document the whole range of knowledge and skills—employability, academic, or technical—they have to offer to employers.

Effective practices in developing and using career portfolios and passports involve defining the roles of different actors, addressing issues of portfolio or passport design, and facilitating students' developmental process (Wonacott 2001). Issues related to career passports, portfolios, and certificates that have not yet been addressed include student outcomes and success (e.g., employment, starting salary), program coordination and cooperation across states, and the possible development of a national model.

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. *Digests* may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://ericacve.org/digests.asp>.

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